Famine of Grain and Cloth

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HARIJAN

Editor: PYARELAL

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SOME LABOUR QUESTIONS

(*By M. K. Gandhi*)

During the pilgrimage to Madras and Palni the following document signed by 259 persons was handed to me at a tremendously large meeting of labourers at Golden Rock:

"We the workers of the S. I. Ry. beg to place before you some of our major problems with a view to get your support.

"Nearly 264,000 workers are going to be retrenched all over the Railways. In S. I. Ry. alone 10,000 will be retrenched and till now more than 2,000 have been discharged. The Government contemplate absorption of ex-service men in place of Railwaymen, thus putting us against the ex-soldiers.

"We have been demanding a minimum living wage of Rs. 30/- per mensem. At present the lowest wage is Rs. 8/- to Rs. 15/- and a majority of us receive less than Rs. 18/- per mensem.

"Out of 42,000 Railway employees only 8,000 are provided with quarters, of which the majority are infested with insanitary conditions, and are without proper ventilation.

"You may be aware of the decision of the All India Railwaymen's Federation demanding adjudication or a court of enquiry if they refuse to redress our grievances and accept the suggestions. The suggestions were intended for improvements in the Railway system and the condition of the employees. For your reference we are giving below the sixteen suggestions forwarded to the Railway Board and the Government by the Federation.

1. Reduction of work to 40 hours per week as a first step and further to 40 hours per week for all the staff including running staff without fall in wages.
2. Introduction of weekly calendar days off for all the Railwaymen.
3. Leave reserves to be increased to 25%.
4. Reduction of rail length for Engineering gangmen.
5. Extension of leave facilities to daily rated and inferior service staff on a par with subordinates.
6. All the work now done through contract labour should be taken over departmentally.
7. Reduction of mileage for overhaul of locomotives, wagons and carriages.
8. Expansion of workshop production namely construction of boilers, engine parts etc..
9. Manufacture of locomotives, carriages and wagons in the Indian Railway workshops.
10. Rebuilding of third class carriages so as to provide better facilities for passengers such as bath rooms, fans, and sleeping accommodation for long distance travel etc..
11. Reopening all the lines that were closed and the restoration of all the trains stopped during the period of war and further expansion of services to meet the needs of the public.
12. A programme of house building with a view to provide decent houses for all Railwaymen.
13. Construction of new lines to suit the needs of the country.
14. Laying down of double tracks wherever necessary.
15. Introduction of Rail Motor transport to the distant towns and villages where railways cannot reach.
16. R. A. F. workshops now controlled by Railways to be maintained and extended to serve the needs of aviation.

"In the demand of ours for full work, living wages, proper housing facilities etc., we request you to support us and give a lead in the matter to the country and force the Railway Board to accept the same and save thousands of Railwaymen and others from unemployment, misery and poverty."

If the workers are to be retrenched in order to make room, as alleged in the letter, for ex-soldiers, it is, in my opinion, doubly wrong. Wrong for the ex-soldiers in that they will be favoured and a soldier who accepts favoured treatment is no soldier. The second wrong will be to the men to be retrenched who, for no fault of their own, will be thrown out of employment. It will not do to say they were temporary hands. The State has to find work for all unemployed persons.

Coming to the Railwaymen's demands, items Nos. 1-9 and No. 12 fall, in my opinion, within the sphere of labour, but whether they are reasonable or not cannot be said without hearing the Railway Authorities' side. They should be referred to arbitration. They cannot be made a subject of strike before the process of arbitration has been gone through. Any lightning strike is a form of dictation which is dangerous.

Items Nos. 10, 11 and 13-16 cannot legitimately be demanded by labourers. They are passengers' grievances and passengers, i. e. the public, can take them up.

Item No. 10, I would consider quite extravagant. By far the largest number of passengers belong to the 3rd class and I have no doubt they deserve progressively better treatment, not the 1st and 2nd

class. Railway cars of the not distant future will have no classes. Classless society is the ideal, not merely to be aimed at but to be worked for and, in such society, there is no room for classes or communities. Until that time is arrived at, 1st and 2nd class comforts should be standardized and lowered where necessary and all attention bestowed upon 3rd class passengers. But I cannot visualize a time when 3rd class carriages, no matter how distant the journey may be, can carry bathing accommodation for tens of thousands of travellers. What is required is proper bathing arrangements for 3rd class passengers at railway stations. 3rd class passengers are the most neglected in India. Railway cars and railway stations should be utilized for proper education of the public in sanitation and cleanliness. This is not the case today. And the quicker Hindu and Mohammedan tea or water distinctions disappear the better. Why should the State recognize these unnatural and irreligious distinctions? Those who consider themselves defiled by service rendered by persons not belonging to their own persuasion may well be left to their own resources.

The Association for Railway Passengers' relief should certainly ventilate grievances before the authorities. Their main work should be to conduct sustained education among the passengers as to their own duty towards one another and about observing laws of cleanliness and hygiene.

Sevagram, 8-2-'46

AND SO IT CAME OUT

Despatching of matter for the 'Harijan' weeklies always used to be a bit of an exciting adventure when Gandhiji used to be constantly on the move. It involved pouring over railway maps and endless columns of Bradshaw and the Indian Post and Telegraph Guide, checking up of train timings and train connections, not to mention the exigencies of late arrivals and erratic habits of certain trains. It made some of Gandhiji's staff fair experts in the arcana of Indian postal lore. For instance, Gandhiji could tell with exact precision the time the post would take to be delivered at a particular place by the various alternative routes. Once in the course of Gandhi-Irwin negotiations a question arose as to whether a particular letter which Lord Irwin had addressed to Gandhiji had been despatched in time. Lord Irwin maintained that it must have been. "Then it ought to have reached me before I left Bardoli," replied Gandhiji. "You better make an inquiry in your office. There is bound to have been some despatching delay." And so in the end it proved to be.

But all his precision availed nothing this time before the vagaries of the 'special' which brought us to Wardha from Madras. It was the European member from Madras, I think, who once, in the course of a debate in the Central Assembly, compared the "speed and steadiness" of the Grand Trunk Express to that of a "drunken caterpillar in the final stages of inebriety". Well, Gandhiji's special train outdid the record of Mr. F. E. James' Grand Express. It was scheduled to reach Wardha at 5 p. m.. The Bombay Mail left Wardha at 6.10 p. m.. From Madras to Madura and Palni and back was a giddy whirl of distractions for Gandhiji and he did the bulk of his writing during the train journey to Wardha. We had counted upon posting part of the copy from Wardha. All of a sudden on the morning of the 5th Gandhiji called me. "Are we running to time?", he asked. "There was an unnecessary forty minutes' delay at Bezwada and another at Kazipet."

"It is true," I said. "We are already two hours behind time. The delay I am told was owing to the difficulty in clearing the crowds at the stations named."

"Let me have a list of train stoppages at once," he remarked. "Let us see whether we cannot eliminate some of them to make up for the lost time." I ran to the guard and explained to him the situation.

"Sorry," he replied. "Only two more stoppages. One is the reversing station, the other the watering station."

"Then speed up till the boiler bursts," I said laughing rather ruefully.

"Track restrictions within the Nizam's Dominions don't permit it," he replied.

All the same when he came to report to Gandhiji a few minutes later he solemnly promised to 'try' to take the train to Wardha in time. It was however clear that his offer was to be taken only in the Pickwickian sense. There were 238 miles yet to be covered and even at the rate of 40 m. p. h. and without any stoppage it would need six hours. By that time it would be 8 p. m.. So we gave up all further striving. Apparently the train staff took the cue from us and, what with the "watering requirements" of the everthirsty engine and with other causes too abstruse for a layman to follow, the train arrived at Wardha at 11.45 at night.

What was to be done? Get the matter sent by air from Bombay? But the plane takes off from Bombay before the arrival of the Bombay Mail these days. "Let us send copies of all the articles to Bombay and get the first issue of the 'Harijan' weeklies printed there," Gandhiji suggested. "I once did like that in Phœnix in the case of 'Indian Opinion'.

"But what about despatch? We have not got the subscribers' registers." So that was that.

"Let us try to send all articles including Hindustani and Gujarati by wire," I suggested.

"Then put the Hindustani and Gujarati articles in Roman script."

I spent the whole of the morning at this thankless task. (When will our news agencies begin to transmit press messages in Rashtrabhasha over the wires?) But, in the meantime Kanu Gandhi had a brainwave. "Send English articles by wire and the rest by a special messenger. He will reach there one day late but if the Harijan work begins earlier, the press will be able to catch up with the rest. And so a special messenger was sent and the first issue of the three weeklies was once more brought out in time after all the misadventures.

Sevagram, 9-2-'46 PYARELAL

GANDHIJI'S STATEMENT

Gandhiji has issued the following statement to the press:

The food situation brought the Private Secretary to H. E. the Viceroy to me. I had many meetings and appointments up to a fairly long time. These I could not disregard and I do not know how to fly and hope I may never have to do so. Therefore, in reply to an imperative invitation from His Excellency, I asked that he should send me someone who could speak for him and so the P. S. V. came yesterday. Food situation alone brought him to me. Could I say something in order to lift the question out of the political arena and out of the general distrust of Government intentions and policy? As the matter brooks no delay I give here the purport of what I said. So far as the Congress policy is concerned His Excellency should invite Maulana Sahib and if he cannot come ask him to name his deputy. I personally feel that the present irresponsible executive should be immediately replaced by a responsible one chosen from the elected members of the Central Legislature. I also personally feel that this responsibility should be shouldered by the elected members of the Central Legislature irrespective of parties, for famine of cloth and food is common to the millions of India. Whether the Government can accept the suggestion and whether the different political parties that compose the Central Legislature consider it practicable or not is more than I can say. But this much I can say without fear of contradiction. I have little doubt that if the mercantile community and the official world become honest, if only in face of the impending calamity, we are such a vast country that we can just tide over the difficulty even if no help comes from the outside world, which is itself groaning. Grain and cloth dealers must not hoard, must not speculate. Food should be grown on all cultivable areas wherever water is or is made available. Flower gardens should be used for growing food crops. This has been done during the period of war. The present is, in some respects, worse than the war period. Before we have eaten up the grain we have in stock we must economize like misers. All ceremonial functions should be stopped. Women can play the highest part in the alleviation of the present distress by economizing in their households. In nine tenths of our activity we can manage our daily affairs without the aid of the Government, whatever its colour may be, if only it will refrain from interfering with the people. Panic must be avoided at all costs. We must refuse to die before death actually takes toll and think of the skeletons of India and the least little thing we may do to help, and all will be well with India. Let us not hypnotize ourselves into the belief that because we can indulge ourselves, our next-door neighbour can do likewise. Cloth famine, I know, is a mockery for, if only the Government and millowners will act honestly and intelligently, no one need go naked for want of cloth. We have cotton enough and idle hands enough and skill enough to make in our villages all the cloth we need.

Note: Readers will realize that as it was Gandhiji's silence day his replies could only be given in writing. EDITOR

PRESERVATION OF CATTLE

(By M. K. Gandhi)

The Goseva Sangh which has its headquarters in Wardha was the late Shri Jamnalalji's last creation. He served the public cause in a variety of ways. For years money-making had ceased to be his main occupation. If he cared for money it was only with the object of financing public activities. Eleventh day of February was the fifth anniversary of his death, and his followers and comrades decided to celebrate this anniversary by holding a meeting of friends and workers of the Goseva Sangh.

An hour before he died he was working for this cause. Gopuri where the meeting took place is his creation. His ashes rest there and the first meeting of the Sangh was also held there. The name *Goseva* was chosen after careful thought. The sense of patronage contained in *Goraksha* was eliminated by the substitution of the word *Seva*. The Hindu believes in the cow as mother and indeed she is so. An American has described her as the "Mother of Prosperity" and the description is correct. It is another matter that they eat beef in the West. They believe, at the same time, that the cow occupies the highest place amongst those animals which contribute to man's comfort and happiness. It is difficult, if not impossible, for an Indian to think of man as being able to live without cow's milk.

Preservation of cattle is a vital part of *Goseva*. It is a vital question for India. And it is a tragedy that the country which worships the cow pays scant attention to her and her progeny. While we may not kill the cow we definitely torture her. Matters have reached such a sorry pass that today cattle seem to have become a burden and people talk of killing them off in order to lighten this load. What could one Jamnalalji do to battle against such odds? And now, even he is not among us.

Speeches are not going to solve the problem. There is urgent need for deep study and the spirit of sacrifice. To amass money and dole out charity does not connote real business capacity. To know how to preserve cattle, to impart this knowledge to the millions, to live up to the ideal oneself and to spend money on this endeavour is real business. Today the opposite obtains. The rich amass wealth somehow and salve their consciences by giving a paltry sum out of it towards the upkeep of *Goshalas* by untrained persons and fancy that they have acquired merit. Jamnalalji was well aware of these shortcomings and was working out a scheme to overcome them. In the meanwhile, death claimed him. Perhaps even greater capacity is needed to solve this immensely difficult problem than to obtain Swaraj.

(From the Hindustani)

Sevagram, 9-2-'46

HARIJAN

Feb. 17 1946

FAMINE OF GRAIN AND CLOTH

(By M. K. Gandhi)

During my wanderings in Bengal, Assam and Madras I heard tales of distress due to shortage of food and cloth. Reports come to me from other parts of India. They support the same tale. Dr. Rajendraprasad tells me that the Government report expressing fear of shortage of food immediately doubled the market price. This is a bad sign. Such speculation should be a thing of the past. The merchantile community should be competent to curb such greed. Let them not add to the distress caused by the Government mistakes or incompetence. There are merchantile associations and chambers. If they act patriotically, they can help most to prevent panic and speculation.

It is the fashion to blame nature for famine. Scarcity of rain is by no means a monopoly of India. In other countries, though people welcome rains they have made themselves fairly independent of rainfall during a season or two. Here, Government have used themselves and the public to the idea that famines come when there is shortage of waterfall. Had the mind been framed otherwise, they would have made adequate provision for shortfalls. They only tinkered with the problem and naturally so. For, the official world was taught to think no better. Originality there could be none in a close monopoly organization like the Government of India. It is the largest autocracy the world has known. Democracy has been reserved only for Great Britain. And when it rules and exploits millions belonging to other races, it becomes an unmitigated evil. It corrupts the whole island with the idea that such exploitation is the best thing for an enlightened democracy to do. It would be well to remember this fundamental fact, if I have correctly estimated it. If we recognize this, while dealing with the immediate problem we shall be patient with the present actors. There is no call here for patience with the evil. The distinction will enable us the better to deal with the evil.

We must then first put our own house in order as far as may be, and at the same time demand from the foreign Government that since they mean what they say, let them at once replace the irresponsible executive with elected and responsible members from the Central Legislature, however archaic and based only on a limited franchise it may be. There is nothing to prevent the Viceroy from doing this today. I do not propose to answer the difficulties in anticipation. "Where there's a will, there's a way." This one act will restore confidence and allay panic.

"Grow more food" was not a bad cry during the war. It is a greater necessity now. This can be best done only by a national executive. Even its mistakes will not loom so large as those of a nominated executive, however able the latter may be. As it is, even their ability and integrity are in question — rightly so or wrongly is beside the point in this connection. Everything possible should be done to draw water from the bowels of the earth. There is talent enough in this country for the purpose. Provincial selfishness should give place to the national want.

In addition to, not in the place of these measures, grain should be imported from wherever it can be had.

Cloth famine can and ought to be averted by telling the millions to spin and weave in their own villages, the State supplying them with cotton where it is not grown or available and with the simple instruments of production on hire or long-term purchase. The A. I. S. A. with its seasoned workers should be summoned to render assistance and guidance. This will take a few months, if the work is taken up in earnest. Indigenous mills will be called upon to assist this national process by a wise distribution of their cloth in cities and villages while the transition process is going on. Argumentation on the capacity of mills to supply all the cloth required should cease in face of the calamity which is existent and daily growing in intensity. Mills cannot find employment for the millions of unemployed villagers. The educative value of the charkha is not to be surpassed. But for the spell of hypnotism which rules our minds today, we shall all realize this obvious truth, set ourselves working out the concrete proposition and thereby restore confidence to the millions and may be even to the world which has neither enough food nor cloth.

Sevagram, 10-2-'46

QUESTION BOX

(By M. K. Gandhi)

Q. While in conversation or doing brain work or when one is suddenly worried, can one recite *Ramnam* (the name of God) in one's heart? Do people do so at such times and, if so, how?

A. Experience shows that man can do so at any time, even in sleep, provided *Ramnam* is enshrined in his heart. If the taking of the name has become a habit, its recitation through the heart becomes as natural as the heart beat. Otherwise, *Ramnam* is a mere mechanical performance or at best has touched the heart only on the surface. When *Ramnam* has established its dominion over the heart, the question of vocal recitation does not arise. Because then it transcends speech. But it may well be held that persons who have attained this state are few and far between.

There is no doubt whatsoever that *Ramnam* contains all the power that is attributed to it. No one can, by mere wishing, enshrine *Ramnam* in his heart. Untiring effort is required as also patience. What an amount of labour and patience have heen lavished by men to acquire the non-existent philosopher's stone? Surely, God's name is of infinitely richer value and always existent.

Q. Is it necessary for the mind to go through different stages of progress (including collapse)

before it attains absolute calm? Why is it that even when one is awake and quite calm one's mind is often disturbed as in a dream? Why do such things as one has neither felt nor seen in real life intrude into one's conscious or sub-conscious mind?

A. Before attaining perfect calm it is essential for almost everyone to go through stages of progress. I use the word "almost" advisedly. It excludes those who have made consistent effort in a previous existence but without complete success and who will not, therefore, have to pass through purgatory in this life. When the apparently calm mind is disturbed as if by dreams it means that the calm is outward and not inward. What does not appear to have any relation to one's life's experience and yet disturbs shows, in my opinion, that there are many things which have associations but of which one has no recollection.

Q. Is it harmful if, owing to stress or exigencies of work, one is unable to carry out daily devotions in the prescribed manner? Which of the two should be given preference? Service or the rosary?

A. Whatever the exigencies of service or adverse circumstances may be, *Ramnam* must not cease. The outward form will vary according to the occasion. The absence of the rosary does not interrupt *Ramnam* which has found an abiding place in the heart. Sevagram, 9-2-'46

(From the Hindustani)

THE LURE OF LEGISLATURES

(*By M. K. Gandhi*)

I believe that some Congressmen ought to seek election in the legislatures or other elected bodies. In the past I did not hold this view. I had hoped that the boycott of legislatures would be complete. That was not to be. Moreover, times have changed. Swaraj seems to be near. Under the circumstances it is necessary that Congress should contest every seat in the legislatures. The attraction should never be the honour that a seat in a legislature is said to give. The desire and opportunity for service can be the only incentive for a Congressman. Congress should have, and has, such prestige that a Congress candidate is irresistible even where a particular seat is contested. Moreover, those that are not selected by the Board should not feel hurt. On the contrary they should feel happy that they are left free to render more useful service. But the painful fact is that those who are not selected by the Board do feel hurt.

The Congress should not have to spend money on the elections. Nominees of a popular organization should be elected without any effort on the latter's part. Conveyance arrangements for poor voters should be made by their well-to-do neighbours. For instance, if the voters from X have to go to Y, the railway fare from X to Y for the poor voters should be paid by the well-to-do people of X. That is the distinguishing feature of a well organized, non-violent, popular organization. An organization which looks to money for everything can never serve the masses. If money could bring success in a popular contest, the British Government which can and does spend most lavishly should be the most popular body in India. The facts are that even Government servants drawing fat salaries do not, in their heart of hearts, want the British Government.

Let us examine the utility value of legislatures. The legislatures can expose the Government, but that is the least service. He who can tell the people why they become victims of the Government in spite of knowing its faults and can teach them how to stand up against Government wrongs renders a real service. The members cannot do this essential service, for their business is to make people look to them for the redress of wrongs.

The other use of legislatures is to prevent undesirable legislation and bring in laws which are useful for the public, so that as much help as possible can be given to the constructive programme

Legislatures are supposed to carry out the popular will. For the moment eloquence may be of some use in these bodies. Ultimately that will not be the need. Experts with practical knowledge and those who can give to these few their support will be required. In an organization which exists for the sake of service and which has boycotted titles and other such paltry things, the sentiment that to be selected as candidates for the legislatures is a mark of honour is harmful. If such a sentiment takes root, it will bring down the name of the Congress and finally prove its ruin.

If Congressmen are to be reduced to such degradation, who will put flesh and blood into India's millions of skeletons? On whom will India and the world rely? (From the Gujarati)

On way to Sevagram, 5-2-'46

NON-VIOLENT TECHNIQUE AND PARALLEL GOVERNMENT

Midnapore has always been in the forefront of the freedom struggle. The men and women of Mahishadal made history during the Salt Satyagraha of 1930. In the 1931 Satyagraha struggle it again bore the brunt of Government's repression when there was a mass flight of the inhabitants of the villages in Tamluk before the route marches of the military, characterized by such features as forcible salutation of the regimental colours, plunder and worse. The Mahisha community which inhabits the southern portion of this district around and about Mahishadal sub-division is a sturdy cultivator race. Struggle against nature through the centuries has taught them combination and co-operation. Agriculture depends upon proper drainage of the soil and successfully keeping the sea water out of cultivable land by means of dykes. Their sturdiness and social organization are thus a product of their natural environment.

Perhaps no part of India has passed through such fire of suffering as Midnapore during the August upheaval in 1942, when man's brutality completed the work of nature's wrath. Their suffering had chastened them but did not subdue their spirit. The chastening effect was visible in the perfect discipline and pin-drop silence that marked Gandhiji's prayer gatherings which were sometimes attended by over a lakh of people.

The question of non-violence and Jatiya Sarkar naturally constituted the core of the discussions which the Congress workers of Midnapore had with

Gandhiji during his visit to Mahishadal. Jatiya Sarkar was set up in the thanas of Sutahata, Nandigram, Mahishadal and Tamluk in Midnapore Dist. on 17-12-1942 and 16-1-1943 and was formally dissolved on August 8, 1944, as a result of the publication of Gandhiji's statement on secrecy and underground work after his release from detention. By September 1944, about 150 workers connected with it had come out into the open and surrendered themselves to the authorities. In a comprehensive report which the workers of Midnapore submitted to Gandhiji during his visit to Mahishadal they described in graphic detail how during the August upheaval the people had captured thanas, burnt down kutcheries, paralyzed communications, organized a parallel police service, intelligence branch and law courts where delinquents and those engaged in anti-social activities were brought to book and dealt with "according to law". They had scrupulously avoided taking of life, they claimed, and had therefore acted non-violently.

Later on they discussed the whole question of parallel government and sabotage with Gandhiji. "I cannot say," remarked Gandhiji "that all that has been done has been well done or ought to have been done. On the contrary, much of it ought not to have been done. That the people did not remain inert is a matter of satisfaction, but the fact that after all these years they should not have known what the Congress stood for is a matter for sorrow. What they did was thoughtless. By its very nature it could not be sustained.

"You have graphically put in your reports how you blew up a railway track, put a road out of use, burnt a kutchery, seized a thana, set up a parallel government and so on. This is not the technique of non-violent action. People committed the mistake of thinking that all that did not involve killing was non-violence. Sometimes killing is the cleanest part of violence. If you kill the mischief-maker outright, there is an end to it as far as he is concerned, but harassment is worse. It did not put out mischief. On the contrary, it brought the mischief on our own heads. The authorities became vindictive. Perhaps you will say that they would have been vindictive anyhow, but that is not what we should desire or aim at. It does not pay us to let them go into a panic.

"In August 1942, the authorities became panicky. We gave them that excuse. But they are a people who do not know what defeat is; their cowardice is not fundamental. So, they let such things as thanas, kutcheries, panchayat courts etc., remain in your hands for a short while as toys but as soon as they had completed their dispositions they turned the full blast of their machinery of retaliation against us. It is not in this way that India will attain her independence. We cannot afford to repeat it.

"Today you have to reckon not with Britain alone but the Big Three. You cannot successfully fight them with their own weapons. After all you cannot go beyond the atom bomb. Unless we can have a new way of fighting imperialism of all brands in the place of the outworn one of a violent rising, there is no hope for the oppressed races of the earth.

"Let nobody be misled by the Russian parallel," he continued. "Our tradition is wholly different from Russia's. The historical setting too is different. In Russia the whole population was under arms; Indian masses won't take to arms even if they could be given the necessary training. But it is useless to think that our rulers will let us give them that training when they have at a stroke disarmed a first-rate military state like Japan. Today Japan lies prostrate at the conqueror's feet. But non-violence knows no defeat. It must however be true non-violence, not a make-believe. I would not shed a single tear if I alone were left to represent such non-violence."

"After all that we have done and suffered," observed the friends, "we have begun to doubt whether our energies have flown in the right channel, whether the mass awakening was not misdirected. But, is not non-violent rebellion, a programme of seizure of power?" they asked.

"Therein lies the fallacy," replied Gandhiji. "A non-violent revolution is not a programme of 'seizure of power'. It is a programme of transformation of relationships ending in a peaceful transfer of power. If the people had fully carried out the five steps outlined by me in my 8th of August speech in the A. I. C. C. in Bombay, and had there been a perfect atmosphere of non-violence, the Government's power of repression would have been sterilized and it would have been compelled to yield to the national demand.

"If under the impact of foreign invasion or some such cause the ruling power abdicates and a vacuum is created, the people's organization will naturally take over its functions but such Jatiya Sarkar would have no other sanction except that of non-violence and service of the people to enforce its fiats. It will never use coercion. Even those who might hold contrary views will receive a full measure of security under it."

As an instance of the infinitely greater efficacy of the non-violent technique as compared to the technique of coercion, he mentioned the case of Bardoli. In Midnapore whilst they succeeded in capturing a few symbols of power in the initial stages, they could not retain the fruits of their success. But in Bardoli the Satyagrahis were able fully to retain the gains of their struggle. "Moreover, you have seen," resumed Gandhiji, "that all your bravery could not prevent the violation of women. Now that is intolerable. No one should be able to cast an evil eye upon them. This requires inculcation of a higher form of bravery, i. e. that of non-violence which can hurl defiance at death and against which the power of the aggressor cannot prevail. This is what I am trying to do. It may take time. It takes a long time to infuse this kind of higher courage among the millions. Whether this kind of non-violence will ever come into play or not I do not know. But you, who have had training in non-violence for all these years, ought to realize that in your hands non-violence should show all the brilliance that is inherent in it."

They next wanted to know as to how they could start on the right lines. Gandhiji in reply

prescribed to them the spinning wheel as "the symbol and central sun of the 18-fold constructive programme." It was the best way of achieving social solidarity and non-violent organization. The technique of non-violent action consisted in isolating and sterilizing the instruments of evil. Jatiya Sarkar based on non-violence would not put Government servants under duress but would effectively isolate them so that they would either have to align themselves with the people or be reduced to the necessity of carrying out the foreign Governments's writ through undiluted barbarism of which they would soon sicken and tire. Even their relations and dear ones would desert them. "This presupposes that no section among the people is labouring under a sense of injustice and wrong at the hands of the others. Untouchability, exploitation and communal rancour can have no place under a Jatiya Sarkar, or it will be like a house divided against itself which must fall."

Sevagram, 9-2-'46 PYARELAL

Notes

Criminal if True

A letter from Karnatak contains the following information :

"On 1-2-'46 at about 10 a. m. when the Karnatak Provincial Congress Parliamentary Board was conducting its business in its office in Hubli, 20 to 25 persons effected an entrance into the meeting hall without first obtaining permission of the President.

"The Board had met to discuss some important matters. Some of the persons above mentioned asked for time to make certain representations. The President told them that sufficient time for this purpose had been given to them on the previous day. The Board was now engaged in serious deliberations but would see them again during the afternoon. In reply they said they had further important matters to represent and insisted on doing so then and there. The President opined that their attitude was quite inconsistent with due decorum and discipline but they continued to insist, whereupon the President said that he would be obliged to leave the hall. As he stood up in order to go away one member of the party tried forcibly to hold him down. Another snatched the office files from his hands and was going to take them away. Yet another hit Shri Divakar on the head with his umbrella. Persons in the hall finally came to the rescue and restored order."

If such be the case the Congress organization will go to pieces. Indeed, no organization can successfully work under a system of terror. I do not go into the merits. That work will be done by the Congress Working Committee. What is reported to have taken place is not only against decency and all the rules of the game but is manifestly against non-violence. Moreover, there seems to be an indecent longing for getting into the legislatures. This indecency shows that the deciding reason for contesting elections is being lost sight of.

Sevagram, 9-2-'46

Flags And Schools

I have two typical letters about flags in schools and colleges. Some boys hoist the Congress flag, therefore others hoist the League flag. Both are wrong. My correspondents report that the mischief commenced by the hoisting of the Congress flag. Probably nothing would have happened for the time being, if both the flags had been tolerated. The right thing was and is that boys must not take the initiative in such cases. The buildings belong to the authorities and they must decide whether or not to fly, which, if any, flag over their buildings. If boys take the law into their own hands, the result must be chaos and confusion plus breaking of heads. This would be sheer vulgarity and doing no good to anybody. Schools and colleges should be institutions for healing communal breaches, not for promoting differences. If boys and girls do not learn discipline in their schooldays, money and time spent on their education is so much national loss. The one bright thing that emerges from the Lahore episode is that Maulana Saheb Abul Kalam Azad promptly intervened and ruled that the boys who had hoisted the Congress flag were in the wrong.

Sevagram, 11-2-'46 M. K. G.

'Harijan' Without M. D.

'Harijan' has been revived after more than three years, years crowded with events of such magnitude that they seem like an age. The sorrow and suffering that the people have borne with undaunted courage fills one with hope and admiration. No wonder Gandhiji and all our leaders are saying freedom is very near. Freedom is near, but many of those who helped to bring it near are gone. Such a one was Shri Mahadev Desai. All such sacrifices, we have been taught, hasten the day of India's deliverance, and this faith has enabled friends and relatives bravely to bear the loss.

Mahadevbhai often told me thrilling stories of his early experiences with Gandhiji, when he was the only personal assistant that Gandhiji had. At the time of the inception of 'Harijan' also he happened to be the only assistant. They were in Yeravda Prison at that time and Mahadevbhai told me how he had recalled from memory more than a thousand addresses and despatched the copies of the paper to them single-handed. Although Gandhiji was the editor of 'Harijan' in the beginning, from its very inception in 1933 right to the end in August 1942, I do not think one ever picked up 'Harijan' without finding in it something rich and beautiful from M. D.'s pen. Even from the sick-bed his contributions came regularly. He had such a facile pen that Gandhiji could write as much or as little as he wanted to. M. D. was always ready to do the rest. And he did not do so anyhow. Gandhiji and the public had come to realize how faithful his interpretation was. His word had come to have almost the authority of the word of his master. That is why when Gandhiji had a breakdown in 1935 he transferred the editorship of 'Harijan' to Mahadevbhai.

To most of us 'Harijan' had for years become associated with Mahadevbhai's pen as much as Gandhiji's. I remember how once Mahadevbhai left a pair of sandals in front of Gandhiji's hut with 'M. D.' inscribed on them. Sardar in his inimitable humour twitted him, "Mahadev, don't have your sandals there. Some visitor might mistake them for a new type of 'Harijan'! 'M. D.' had become a symbol for 'Harijan'.

Mahadevbhai was a voracious reader. He had the bad habit of never going to sleep without reading in bed. But he had so lost himself in work that whatever he read he read with a view to finding good material for 'Harijan'. The book that was last in his hands, almost up to half an hour before his death, 'The Art of Living' by Andre Maurois

bears testimony to this. It has many marginal notes and marked paragraphs by him.

His loss has been irrepairable. With the revival of 'Harijan' it is felt more than ever.

Sevagram, 9-2-'46 S. N.

WOMEN'S CORNER

Gauhati is the gateway to Assam. We put up in an Ashram, newly started, in a small village named Sarania, a few miles out of the city. The Ashram is located on a slight elevation overlooking the tiny village. The surroundings are charming. Trees offer shade and what ought, in time, to be a good garden, goes up in terraces. A new hut of bamboo matting had been put up for Gandhiji. This temporary structure will be made permanent. One simple pukka building with a kitchen and verandah is already up. Amalprabhadevi, daughter of Dr. Das in Gauhati, has decided to dedicate her life to the service of the villagers. She has refused to marry and her father, unlike most parents, has not only not discouraged her desire to serve but is giving her all the help he can. She has three village girls at the moment whom she is training. She has a doctor sister who helps her when needed. While we were there this sister was in charge of the food which was simple and cleanly served on what looked like white marble slabs but were in reality pieces from the bark of the banana tree, neatly sliced and washed. Excellent milk was procured from two nearby villages and a perfect diet of simply prepared vegetables, rice or bread, lettuce, tomatoes, raw onions and oranges was provided. There was no waste and no superfluity as so often happens with guests. During our stay the place was alive with crowds of visitors but ordinarily it is a peaceful spot with plenty of inspiration to be had from the natural beauty of the wooded surroundings and the view of hills in the distance. More young women with the courage and spirit of service of Amalprabhadevi are needed for the service of women and children in villages.

Durgabai, an indefatigable worker, has lately managed to get land and put up a building in the city of Madras, which is to serve as a hostel for girls. We all know the crying need for such shelters for girl students whether they be from the cities or the neighbouring villages. Of course, this hostel will admit girls of all classes and creeds. Common institutions like this are one great means of removing agelong prejudices as also the canker of untouchability.

In spite of advancing years and failing eyesight, Dr. Muthulakshmi carries on her life-long work of rescuing destitute girls and boys, generally children of women dedicated to evil lives. Now her home in Adyar also contains several Burma evacuees, mostly Tamil Harijans. The children are fortunate to have found a mother in her. Her cry is for girl workers who will lighten the burden but alas! such are not easily forthcoming in spite of the tremendous need.

Dr. Sunderam Ramachandran's Maternity and Child Welfare Health Centre close by to Dr. Muthulakshmi's home is worth emulation. Numbers of poor women and children come and obtain free attention and medicines. There is room for in-patients too. As is usual with all voluntary endeavour, most things have to be improvised, more room, more medicines, more of everything is needed. Had we our own Government, such institutions would not lack anything. As it is, every endeavour from the national side continues to be regarded with suspicion and, if not actively opposed, is generally left to fend for itself.

Just as in Assam the lovely 'sal' and bamboo forests, the mighty Brahmaputra with wooded hills on either side, the inexpressible beauty of the rising and setting sun on the calmly flowing waters of this river took one's mind away for some time from the poverty, dirt and squalor in which our people live, so did the colourful crowds of the women of Tamil Nad enthral one. I have never seen such crowds as those which greeted Gandhiji everywhere during his recent tour and certainly never as many women as were content to stand the heat of the sun or the cold of a winter night without a murmur. Rajaji with humour particularly his own said one day to Gandhiji: "What have you done to make these women risk their lives in these terrific crowds?", and both had a hearty laugh! There is no doubt that there is an awakening among women. This tide we, who are in a position to do so, should try to take at the flood so that we may direct it into right channels.

The mass of colour displayed in the women's section of the crowd was wonderful. Sitting in the sun they looked like a field of flowers of every hue. I do not think I have seen men in any other part of India wearing brightly coloured 'dhoties' either. All this colour is surely a legacy of the gaiety and laughter that was once ours. The dreary drab of village life of today has to be made colourful once again in every sphere by unabated effort on our part.

One of the most pathetic sights was to have young boys running along by the side of Gandhiji sitting near the window of the train when it was slowly steaming out of a station and pointing to their hungry mouths and empty stomachs. Let us hope we shall not be faced with another catastrophe like that of Bengal.

Sevagram, 11-2-'46 A. K.

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